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Dr. Steincrohn previously has written columns dealing with tobacco.

One of Our Greatest Problems

By PETER J. STEINCROHN, M.D., F.A.C.P.

"What I like about your column," writes Mr. T. T. of Detroit, Mich., "is that you have the courage to state your convictions. Everybody is saying exercise is good for you—but you preach physical laziness. It is accepted in many quarters that cigarette smoking is unquestionably the cause of lung cancer—but you say you are not yet convinced. We all know that alcoholism is one of our greatest problems—but you suggest that practically everyone after the age of 40 take a cocktail or highball before dinner.

"I am sure that you receive many strenuous objections in your mail. My main reason for writing is to tell you that quite a number of us are on your side. We like your reasonable approach—your willingness to see both sides of the problems."

Answer—I appreciate your kind words. But I wonder if I really deserve any credit. I never liked sitting on a picket fence!

That's what many people do. They are willing to suffer privately (by keeping their thoughts to themselves); rather than jump off and make statements that may call forth the wrath of many of their fellows.

For example, when I say that overexertion is worse for heart patients than relative inactivity, I may be going against present opinion on the subject, but why is it being courageous to say what one believes? Especially when such beliefs arise from personal experience in treating heart patients for over 30 years?

And when I suggest that alcohol in moderate amounts is an excellent medicine for the middle-aged and the elderly—I say so in spite of the fact that I recognize that chronic alcoholism is one of our most distressing problems.

It just happens that in my medical experience, I have never made a drunkard out of anyone past 40 whom I advised to take an ounce or two (no more) of liquor a day. Thousands of patients have thanked me for this bit of advice.

It has brought comfort to angina patients, to hypertensives, to arteriosclerotics, to tension-tired business men who came home too tired to sit down to dinner.

Of course, I realize the potential dangers of chronic alcoholism; but I recognize alcohol's benefits, too.

As for smoking, Mr. T. T., I suppose you have reference to my having said something like, "I don't advise nonsmokers to begin smoking; neither do I advise all smokers to stop. For many, it is a harmless enjoyment."

I tell many people to give up tobacco, however—ulcer patients, coronary patients, many hypertensives, people with artery disease in their legs, emphysema patients, asthma and chronic bronchitis sufferers, those with Buerger's disease and people with chronic coughs due to sinus disease.

Cigarettes and lung cancer? There is much evidence, but the facts are not all in—nor conclusive. When they are, I'll be the first to throw away my tobacco, and immediately send the word out through this column that you had better do likewise.

Until then, life being relatively short for all of us, I think we human beings have the right to enjoy our "harmless" pleasures until they are definitely proved to be otherwise.

People ask, "Do you yourself do as you say?" I do.

I smoke about 10 cigarettes and two or three cigars a day. When I take to my pipe, cigarettes and cigars "are out."

I take a highball before dinner about two or three times a week, and ask my wife to "remind" me to take one on the other days.

As for exercise, I continue to be "physically lazy."

Unlike you, Mr. T. T., many readers will be saying I'm an "awful man."

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How to STOP KILLING YOURSELF

By DR. PETER J. STEINCROHN

Tobacco: Curse or Solace?

I continue to get mail from readers who disagree with my attitude toward cigarette smoking and lung cancer. Many of you may recall that I have not been convinced beyond a doubt that tobacco is the cause of cancer.

I have said that I'd feel safer smoking a half pack of cigarettes a day than being caught in traffic for 5 or 10 minutes behind the exhaust pipes of diesel buses.

I have said (moderate smoker that I am) that I'd be the first to throw my tobacco, pipes and the rest away as soon as I was convinced that tobacco is really the culprit. And I'd tell you right away, too.

Tobacco is bad for some (cardiacs, ulcer patients, thromboangitis patients, etc.); but it appears to be harmless for many others.

Whenever I read anything in medical literature which comes from a good source and which reinforces my thinking on the subject, naturally I tell you about it.

For example, in Scope Weekly, I have been reading of a report given by Dr. William F. Rienhoff, jr., associate professor of surgery at the Johns Hopkins School of Medicine. He was giving a 25-year evaluation of lung cancer, covering nearly 800 cases.

In connection with that report, Dr. Rienhoff said that he had found "not the slightest evidence" that cigarettes are more likely to cause cancer than are the air pollutants that everyone breathes—such as exhaust fumes.

CIGARETTES BRING solace to many people and I see no reason to scare smokers to death," said Dr. Rienhoff, himself a nonsmoker.

As always, I try to prepare against the many letters I receive following such a column as this. People will be accusing me, as they often do, of being an owner of tobacco securities (which I'm not), and of being on the payroll of the tobacco companies (ditto).

But I am hopeful that many readers will continue to look at the problem coolly and objectively until we have an unequivocal answer.

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